2: Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1936
OO12 Malekula OO12
Small Islands

ATCHIN TWENTY YEARS AGO

JOHN W. LAYARD

105 ATCHIN[1] is one of a string of five small coral islands, the others being Vao, Wala, Rano, and Uripiv, lying off the north-east coast of Malekula, the inhabitants of which form an ethnic unit and refer to themselves as Sea Folk in contra-distinction to what they term the Bush Folk of the Malekulan mainland. The islands are remarkably uniform, both in size and situation, each covering an area of about half a square mile, and being separated from the mainland by a channel about half a mile wide. Each island supports a population of from four hundred to five hundred varying in physique and in intelligence as much as any average English community, from individuals with comparatively light copper-coloured skin and a degree of intelligence equal at least to that of an intelligent white man, to those of much darker pigmentation and minds approximating more closely to the white man's idea of what he is pleased to call a "savage." Since there is no room for cultivation, the inhabitants of each island own a strip of land on that part of the Malekulan mainland immediately opposite to it, on which they till their gardens. In addition to the communally owned long-distance canoes, in which they sail long distances on trading expeditions, each man possesses a coastal canoe, and the fleet of small canoes sailing or paddling over to the mainland every morning during the agricultural season and returning at night laden with food is one of the most pleasing sights that can be seen in Malekula.

Though forming an ethnic unit, these islands have no central government, nor are there any chiefs such as exist among the Big Nambas of the North Malekulan Plateau. Each of these minute communities (the population of Atchin at the time of my visit numbered 401) has its own language, as distinct from that of its neighbours as any two cognate European languages, and is

101 [1] With regard to the origin of the word "Atchin," the name given to this island by its own inhabitants is *tsan*, to which, when speaking of it from afar, is prefixed the directional particle *nga*. The work of the Admiralty Survey on these islands is on the whole correct, so that I was puzzled by the considerable divergence in sound between the words *nga-tsan* and Atchin. A second puzzle was presented by the fact that the names given on the Admiralty Chart for the only three Malekulan mountains marked in the vicinity of Atchin were not the names of mountains at all, but the names of villages situated much nearer the coast, in a dialect which differed somewhat both from the Malekulan and from the Atchin pronunciation. Nor did there appear to be any directional relationship between the mountains and the respective villages which were alleged to bear their names. This conundrum remained unsolved till, on visiting the neighbouring island of Wala, I found that in the language spoken there the name for Atchin was *tsin* and the directional particle *a*. From the much closer approximation of the white man's word Atchin to the Wala *a-tsin* it occurred to me that the surveying party, or that section of it which had recorded the name, probably landed on Wala. This supposition was confirmed on finding that the names of the three villages, wrongly used for mountains (viz. Rarab, Batelembe, and Lalembe), were also in the Wala dialect, and that the villages themselves were situated in an approximately direct line between the mountains and Wala. Though I have not looked up the records, it is thus clear that the surveyors, standing on Wala, were given not only the name Atchin, but also, when pointing at the mountains, were given the names, not of the mountains, but of the intervening villages to which the natives thought they were pointing.

[p. 342]

2: Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1936
0012 Malekula 0012
Small Islands

possessed of an extremely complex social organization by means of which each island is divided asymmetrically into nameless halves, each rivalling the other and ready at any moment to develop into two hostile groups. In the island of Vao, which preserves the oldest form of social organization in the group, one-half comprises one double village, and the other half two double villages. As with the two halves of the island, so each of the two double villages in the larger half is apt to become hostile to the other, as also is each single village within the unit of the double village. Each single village is further subdivided into two divisions called "Sides of the Stone," which in turn are divided into two family groups, each of which is again subdivided into two smaller family groups.[1] Each village possesses a dancing-ground and central village lodge called *ghamal* where public business is carried on, business concerning individual joint-families being carried on in family lodges called *na-tamp* closely associated with the graves of the ancestral dead. Each of the groups in the progressive bisection of the community is apt to become hostile to its opposing group. On the other hand, each pair of groups combines in ritual activities leading to cohesion, or in the face of a common foe. In every case, whether in matters affecting ritual cooperation or warlike preparation, whether in family affairs or in affairs affecting the whole island, the final decision depends on an informed public opinion led by the older members of the group in conclave. Similar social groupings, modified by a more recent intrusive culture from the Malekulan mainland, obtain in the remaining islands of the group. In all the islands descent is predominantly patrilineal, marriage being regulated along strictly exogamous lines as between patrilineal groups varying in size from the single village to (in the case of Wala) the entire island, as well as matrilineally between relatives tracing common descent extending to three generations backward on the mother's side. Marriages, equally strictly regulated, also occur (and in the island of Wala necessarily do occur) with members of mainland villages and with members of other islands within the ethnic group, whose dialects are known to one another in such a way that every native is acquainted with at least three and often more than three distinct languages.

105 ●

This complex social organization and linguistic ability presuppose no mean intelligence, and are accompanied by, and intimately bound up with, a genealogical and historical sense unrivalled in Melanesia, to be compared only, so far as the Pacific is concerned, with that of the Polynesians, with whom these people have close cultural connections. On Atchin exact pedigrees, checked by various means, reach back for seventeen generations, and include detailed accounts of the doings of many of the figures appearing in them as well as the ancestry of the various inter-related joint-families which together build up the village organization.

These pedigrees are not only orally preserved. The natives' memories are also kept green by the numerous megalithic monuments which form their most striking memorial. It was the then barely known existence of such monuments, first published by Speiser (1913) that attracted the late

[1] This completely symmetrical arrangement occurs only in the Vao village of Petchul. Organization in the remaining villages has been slightly modified owing to influence from Atchin and elsewhere.

2: Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1936
OO12 Malekula OO12
Small Islands

Dr. W. H. R. Rivers and myself to Malekula.[1] These monuments, which include dolmens, monoliths, stone-platforms, cairns, and circles, primarily and to this day still associated with mortuary ritual, reach their highest development in connection with the great sacrificial rite called *Maki*, the name given in these islands to a socio-religious hierarchy corresponding to the Mangke of the Big Nambas, based on identification with the ancestors and with a mythical hawk. This rite is at once the great unifying factor in these islands and at the same time the most frequent cause of the intensest rivalry. In most parts of Malekula the rite is an individual one, performed by one man at a time, and consists of a number of grades which last a life-time in the taking. In Atchin and the neighbouring islands however, owing to their possession of an anomalous kinship system closely allied to the six-class system of relationship discovered by Deacon on Ambrym, it is a communal one, all men of alternate generations within any given village sacrificing at once. The sacrificial animal is the tusked boar, from which the upper canines have been removed in order to allow unimpeded growth to the tusks, which curve round, re-enter the jaw, and, if the boar is allowed to live, finally emerge again and, in rare instances, make three complete circles. The rearing of these boars is an extremely skilled process in which the inhabitants of these islands excel all others, and is accompanied by many magical performances. These boars are graded according to the size of their tusks at any given moment, and also, while alive, serve as currency for the purchase of wives, for ceremonial exchange between affinal relatives, and for innumerable other purposes. It is thus no small indication of the importance of the *Maki* in native life that it is not unusual at the culminating point of one of these protracted rites for as many as five hundred of these valuable tusked boars, each worth from ten to forty pounds in English money, to be sacrificed at once.

There are two kinds, or to borrow an ecclesiastical term, uses, of *Maki* in these islands. In the older form, still practised in the village of Petehul on Vao, there are two monuments only, a large dolmen and a stone-platform, at each of which the sacrifice is made.

In the newer use as practised on Atchin ten shrines are erected along one side of the dancing-ground, each consisting of a dolmen, a monolith, and a carved wooden image representing the ancestral spirit, surmounted by a roof of which the ridge-pole, resting on the head of the image, represents the head and wings of the mythical hawk. By the side of each shrine nine further dolmens or monoliths (depending on which group of alternate generations is performing the rite) are erected, which, joined together, form a continuous line of a hundred stones. Behind all these stand two stone platforms, also furnished with images and roofed, one for each of the two social groups called "Side of the Stone," and on the other side of the dancing-ground is another continuous line of a hundred small stones. These stones all represent ancestors, and it is to them and to the images that the sacrificial boars are tied. The complete *Maki* which, as has been said, is alternately performed by men of alternate generations, is a protracted composite rite lasting, in its extended form, for anything between fifteen and thirty years, during which an almost

[1] Dr. Rivers stayed only eight days, after which he took a passing motor launch to Tangoa.

2: Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1936
OO12 Malekula OO12
Small Islands

endless series of minor rites are performed, each involving the sacrifice of numerous tusked boars and an enormous expenditure of food for feasts. Each village performs its own rite in its own time, and the major rites attract guests from all other villages on the island, as well as from other islands and from the Malekulan mainland. There are numerous dance-cycles, frequently lasting all night, and finally, before the supreme sacrifice, for five days and nights on end. Each dance-cycle has its own songs, many of which commemorate the deeds of ancestors, and its peculiar gong-rhythms beaten on an orchestra of upright slit-gongs. Some of the songs are of surpassing beauty, and the gong-rhythms are so complicated that no European has yet been known to master them. Interspersed between the dance-cycles performed at stated intervals throughout the rite are a series of formal square dances and dramatic performances called *na-leng*,[1] many of which have become secularized, but some of which remain traditional and form a running commentary on the mythological background of the rite. This, as I hope to show in a forthcoming work, is none other than a dramatization of the Malekulan version of the journey of the dead, briefly described by me in a recent article (1934), which itself forms part of the mythology of megalithic peoples as far apart as the Nagas in Assam, the inhabitants of the Tamil country of Southern India, peoples of the Near East, of the Mediterranean littoral, and, in our own islands, of ancient Scotland, and in Scandinavia.

The bearers of this megalithic civilization were a maritime and river-loving people or peoples, the details of whose adventurous migrations yet remain to be worked out in detail—there have been at least two separate migrations of them into Malekula—but there can be little doubt that from Scandinavia to Malekula and beyond they have a common origin. One of the greatest interests to us therefore in Malekula is the fact that it is not impossible that, in the ritual of the *Maki* and in the beliefs associated with it, we may see a variant of one aspect at least of what some of our own forefathers, the megalith builders of Britain, did and thought. This rite is also one of fertility and of re-birth, each participant marking his assumption of new life by taking a new name, usually that of a maternal ancestor. The sacrifice of tusked boars is known on Atchin, both by precept and through historical tradition, to be a substitute for former human sacrifice, and those who make the highest sacrifice take oaths to keep the peace for varying periods, extending to three years, or, in the case of old men, a lifetime. Though cannibalism still exists, it is contrary to present *Maki* practice, but its close association with more ancient religious forms is still evident in that when an enemy is wounded, a dolmen, similar to that erected in the older *Maki* use, is hastily constructed in the bush, and the body is placed upon it and there ritually sacrificed, the victor thereupon taking a new name as in the *Maki* proper.

Though the wooden images of ancestors and hawks, and the roofs erected over the stone monuments rot, the stone themselves are never taken down, and remain as a memorial to those who sacrificed at them, whose stones they are henceforth said to be. I have shown elsewhere (1928) that monolith and wooden image combined represent an earlier form in which there was no

[1] See Mr. Harrisson's reference to similar performances among the Big Nambas, p. 332.

2: Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1936
OO12 Malekula OO12
Small Islands

wooden image and the monolith itself was carved to represent the ancestral human form, the wooden image having been added only when the art of carving stone was lost, so that what was originally a stone statue became split into two parts, of which the portrait, being of wood, in time disappears, and the plain monolith only remains. Though in Atchin the ritual has become so elaborate as to have largely obscured its original significance, there can be no doubt that in its earlier forms, as still in South-West Bay, the monolith actually represented, and was deemed to be inhabited by, the ghosts of all those ancestors who had previously performed the rite, and, after death, the new sacrificer himself. Hence its importance as a memorial and in the preservation of genealogies and history. Many of the more important figures in Atchin history are thus commemorated, both by their stones and by the preservation of their graves. So strong is the association of ancestors with stones that in semi-mythical accounts they are frequently stated to have had the power to turn themselves into stone during life-time, or to have actually become stone when they died. This process has been carried yet further in the case of those figures associated with the mythology connected with the journey of the dead, who are now to be seen as natural coral blocks standing at various points on the coast along the path trodden by the ghosts of the dead on their way to their future home.

There is no space to do more than mention a few of the most important in the long list of ritual activities in this rich civilization: activities in connection with the belief in ancestors and rites of communion with them; the protracted mortuary ritual; initiation lasting nine months with an intensive period of thirty days in which continuous hoaxes are practised on the luckless novices; the operation of incision; rites connected with the consecration of the long-distance canoes capable of carrying thirty men on trading expeditions to other islands for as far as 80 miles over open sea; a special form of sex initiation performed on the distant island of Omba; the consecration of houses and of tusked boars; magic; their economic life, their fishing, gardening, and trading; their laws of copyright whereby nothing is given, but everything, such as songs, dances, variations in ritual, whole rites, magical formulae, designs for the carving of ancestor-images and of canoe figure-heads, details of house construction and decoration, and a hundred other aspects of their artistically rich culture, is sold by these intensely commercial people at high prices and with due ceremony from individual to individual, village to village, and island to island, thus constituting the framework for the dissemination and blending of endless variations of culture; history and tradition.

One other feature must be mentioned on account of its bearing on the coming of the whites. Mr. Harrisson has already referred to the white-skinned, aquiline-nosed immigrants, who are said to have introduced the latest phases of megalithic culture into that area. On Atchin the equivalent culture-hero is a being called Ta-har, corresponding to the Polynesian Tanggaloa, Banks Islands Tagaro, and the Big Nambas Horo, regarded in Atchin as the benign creator, who is at once a stone and the moon, who made the islands and gave their inhabitants their languages, who arrived in a canoe and introduced the pig and the coconut to ten legendary petromorphic brothers standing on

2: Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1936
OO12 Malekula OO12
Small Islands

105
976

the shore, and whose name, in spite of his sexual activities which they may not have known about, the missionaries subsequently adopted as a fitting translation for the word God.

(*b*) *Conditions in Atchin in* 1914

978

In considering the reaction of the people of Atchin to the coming of the white man it will be of use to bear one principle in mind. Anthropological research shows that culture contact, if it be not too uneven by reason of the too great predominance of one party over the other, is one of the prime causes of vitality and progress; that too great stability, on the other hand, almost always leads to decay. Although the nature of the contact between the whites and natives was one of overbearing disparity, and so was not conducive to progress, the situation was remarkably mitigated in Atchin by the existence of culture movements within the native system itself prior to the white man's advent. In the three islands of Vao, Atchin, and Wala, the phenomena both of progress and of decay were thus already at work. Among the many movements of culture occurring in Malekula within comparatively recent times, there arose some eight generations ago a new centre of diffusion at a spot on the Malekulan mainland opposite Wala. The new form of culture spread first to Wala, which, on the subsequent extinction of the mainland villages, became its classic home. Vao still remained the stronghold of the earlier form of culture previously common to all three islands. Atchin was a half-way house between the two, incessantly acquiring new rites from Wala and passing them on, through the slow methods of ceremonial purchase, to Vao. Both Wala, the classic home, and Vao, which at that time was only beginning to adopt the new rites and beliefs, were at the time of my visit comparatively stagnant, and the people of Atchin, being, through the constant changes that were taking place, looser in mind, were at the same time in all ways more progressive. This chance of history has, to my mind, been of no little importance in conditioning the type of reaction on the part of all three islands to the disturbing fact of the arrival of the whites, whom the Atchin people have withstood with much greater success than either of the other islands, and by whom they were consequently both more feared and more respected.

Mr. Harrisson has been good enough to say that a further contributing factor was the timely visit of the anthropologist at a moment of great stress in the history of Atchin, two months after a serious conflict with the government, which, under normal circumstances, might well have led to a punitive expedition. Whether this is the case I am not in a position to judge. It may however be worth stating that I was, so far as I know, at that time the only white man in the group (with the possible exception of Catholic missionaries) who was unarmed and who expressed appreciation for their culture. It would however in my opinion be untrue to say that this attitude of admiration did more than encourage them in a standpoint they had already taken up—a determination that at all hazards they must maintain their own cultural integrity, even to the point of settling their own disputes if possible without warfare in face of common danger.

One of the white man's great complaints against the natives has always been

3: Harrisson N-5 (1934-1935) 1936
0012 Malekula 0012
Nambas

THE NEW HEBRIDES PEOPLE AND CULTURE

T. H. HARRISSON

195
191

THE New Hebrides and Banks Islands natives have not been described as a unit, and our knowledge of south-central islands culture is still practically nil. The north and south parts of the group have matrilineal descent, but in the centre descent is patrilineal, this being almost certainly the later evolved form. The patrilineal people have two regular characteristics: slit gongs placed upright and a skull cult. The penis wrapper and incision are patrilineal and southern matrilineal, but do not occur in the northern matrilineal section, where the men wear hanging mats or go naked. Female clothing has a typically complex distribution; in the Banks a narrow *tapa* strip, in Santo a tiny leaf strip, in the north-eastern and central islands a red mat, in north Malekula a fringed mat, central Malekula fibrous skirt, south Malekula a plain mat, the southernmost isles a large fibre skirt, very elaborate on Erromango (Humphreys, 1927).

Secret societies have a wide distribution, but the secular graded society (*Sukwe* or *Maki*), the principle feature of life in north and centre, is absent in the south. Stone work is used in connection with this society except in north-east Santo. Hereditary chieftainship dominates the southern isles, but in the north only occurs among the Big Nambas. Remarkable are the long-headed deformation people of south Malekula, with a most elaborate secret-society culture. Totemism has a most erratic distribution, as has the use of *kava*. The most southerly islands have dominantly curvilinear art, but in the north angularity is regular. A benign ancestor-creator, with obvious affinities to Polynesian Tangaroa, is universal and of probably later origin *via* Omba and Malo, while Maui, the earlier Polynesian deity, is confined to the southern islands (*cf.* Williamson, 1924). The importance of the colour red and a rank society for women have a correlated distribution in the north-east and north-centre; splendid pantomimic dances, *na-leng*, the highest manifestation of native art, have a similar distribution, but occur again in simpler form in the southern isles. These too are later influences, as also a form of sacrifice on a stone table. The exact nature and effect of the many haphazard and subsidiary distributions of ideas that have occurred in these islands are being studied by Layard and myself.

105
191
184

The local variation and complexity of this culture is astonishing. There is apparently no single item which is found uniformly throughout the group. Some things have a wide distribution, such as the word-root *mal* connected with the hawk, megapode, and rituals in which these are concerned; a many-barbed spear of casuarina wood; the term for child *natuk;* the ritual importance of tusker pigs; pandean pipes, though these vary greatly in form and usage. Of special interest as culturally peculiar are the Sakaus, with the simplest culture in the area; the communal house hill people of Santo; the Big Nambas and fibre-skirt tribes of Malekula. I am unable to decide which, if any, of these is the earliest and most truly Melanesian form. Our whole attitude to this problem must be revised before knowledge can advance.

Within the tribe the shape, architecture, and type of house built is constant,

3: Harrisson N-5 (1934-1935) 1936
0012 Malekula 0012
B S Nambas

but there is a big range of inter-tribal difference; take several islands and the variety is great. Curved houses seem to be found only in south Malekula, Vureparapara of the Banks (*cf.* Speiser, 1913, Pl. 15), and the southern islands of the group, an extraordinary distribution. To understand the development and organization of the village only structurally, a full study of each particular unit is necessary.

Speiser (1913) has said something of the distribution of stone works. Stone pudding-basins are confined to Big Bay. I was interested in stone axes, of which I made a considerable collection. Remarkable stone basins, "witching-vats," are confined to Gaua, where Mrs. Baker and I also found a stone effigy (Baker, 1935). In one small area of south-west Santo, around the village of Tavua, the stone axes are entirely distinct from all others in the group, being very slender and long in relation to their breadth. Shell axes do not occur in Santo, but are common in Malekula; in the Big Nambas there are some ritual clubs that seem to be made out of fossilized squid's cuttles, very long and heavy.

War-clubs are curved only in north-east Santo; long stick clubs are confined to the northern islands; paddle clubs characteristic of Malekula are absent on Santo. The Santo and Malo bows are regularly arched; in south and east Malekula the concavity is uneven, greater in the lower half. Feathered spear shafts are apparently confined to north Malekula and islets; fearful spear-tips of serried human bones only in Santo. Feather-shafted arrows I have not seen in Santo, but Speiser reports them from Big Bay, and there are two without locality in the Cambridge Ethnological Museum; in certain *na-leng* dances of north Malekula, feathered arrows are used. Combs worn in the hair show wide pattern range; a triangular form I have only seen on Gaua, and ones with handles decorated by pigs' bristles are confined to Sakau, Santo.

The distribution of *kava* is curious. It has a very local usage in north Malekula, where it is chewed and spat into a trough; is not used in south Malekula; in Sakau, Santo, the stalk is chewed; elsewhere in Santo the root is chewed and spat out into coconut shells (only by chiefs in part of the north-west), except around Turi, where it is absent. In the eastern islands *kava* is generally used green, crushed with a stone pounder. On Malo it is seldom used unless in magical rites.

There is a fair uniformity in the type of mixed bisexual dances connected with the graded society; the musical instruments vary more. Pan-pipes are the most important in north-west Santo; though widespread, these are seldom used for dances elsewhere; they are semi-sacred in central Malekula; into Sakau and Malekula the pan-pipes have been recently introduced. On Malo and in east Santo bamboos beaten on the ground are the main dance accompaniment; the former type is close to a large flute figured by Speiser (1913, Pl. 108). The nose-flute is used in Sakau; musical bow in central-south Malekula. Slit gongs are always upright in the patrilineal central islands, reclined in the northern islands. Sticks tapped together have developed into a dance band in the Big Nambas. Bone knives are common in south Malekula, but nowhere else have I found one; wooden knives are absent in Malekula, crude in Malo and W. Santo, elaborate in the Banks Islands.